

## Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*



**Folk Name:** Fork-tailed Striker, Big Gull

**Status:** Migrant

**Abundance:** Rare to Uncommon

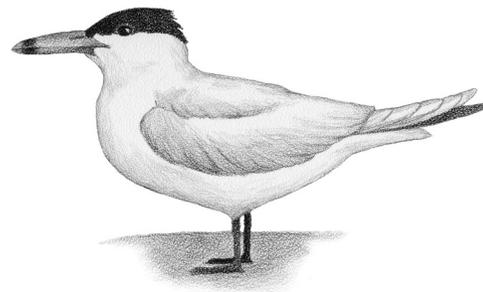
**Habitat:** Open water, lake edge

At 21 inches, the Caspian Tern is the largest tern in the world, rivaling the size of many large gulls. Caspian Terns are distributed around the globe, and their population is expanding. A relatively small population breeds on the coast of North Carolina. Nesting has been documented in South Carolina as well. Caspian Terns are periodically found inland along large lakes and rivers. If you observe a very large tern in this region, suspect Caspian Tern first, then consider the similar-looking Royal Tern which is a casual visitor here. These are our only “crested” terns, birds that exhibit a slight crest on the back of their heads.

This tern is a reliable, but rare to uncommon migrant in our region each spring and fall. A few birds have been found during summer months as well. Most are seen in September. Our earliest arrival date is 3 April, and our latest departure date is 9 October. There is one report between November and March. An observer reported one in Pineville on December 27, 2014.

Flo and Bill Cobey were the first to report the Caspian Tern in the region. They found 10–12 birds along the Catawba River on August 10, 1965. The flock was actively fishing. Four Caspian Terns were sighted by Barrett Crook and John Whitlock while on a boat in Tuckertown Lake on May 9, 1964. A Caspian Tern was counted by Jane Mullen on the Iredell County SBC in the spring of 1973. David Wright observed one Caspian Tern in full breeding plumage on Lake Norman on April 30, 1982, and observed four on the lake on August 31, 1983. Dick Brown reported Caspian Terns present on Lake Norman in April 1987. Several were found in the region after Hurricane Hugo rolled through. Allen Bryan counted 16 near Shelby on September 22, 1989, and David Wright spotted two on Lake Norman the same day. Two, possibly the same birds, were seen again on the lake the following day. Steve Tracy found a flock of 10 at the Allen Steam Plant in Gaston County on April 21, 1996. Two were reported on Moss Lake in Cleveland County on April 18, 1997.

Caspian Terns have been found in the region annually since the turn of the twenty-first century. Numbers have ranged from one to possibly more than a hundred birds,



but almost all of the sightings are of fewer than 20 seen in one day. Ken Kneidel spotted a group of 64 Caspian Terns on Lake Norman on September 14, 2014. However, he believed there were more present. Kneidel wrote:

I saw all of the birds simultaneously, circling and diving. Several were close enough for me to see their reddish bills and black caps. Their identification was unmistakable. Several others have reported Caspian Terns on Lake Norman, in multiple groups over the past few days. 15 minutes previously I had counted 52 Caspian Terns 8 miles down the lake. I feel these were separate groups, but to be conservative I'm only reporting this one group. I'm convinced that I saw at least 116 Caspian Terns this evening on Lake Norman.



*Caspian Tern over Lake Norman. (Jeff Lemons)*